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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2145 (2014), by which I was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report was issued on 18 June 2014 (A/68/910-S/2014/420). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

2. The second-round run-off in the presidential election was held on 14 June between Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. The determination displayed by millions of Afghans to cast their ballots for a second time in three months and the performance of the Afghan security forces were welcomed both inside the country and internationally. Once again, the insurgency did not cause significant disruption to the process. However, in the weeks after the vote political tensions over allegations of massive fraud and the related activities of the electoral commissions came to the fore, leading to a serious political impasse with grave destabilizing consequences for the political, security, economic and social environment of the country.

3. At the request of the two candidates and the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, the United Nations assumed an enhanced role in supporting the electoral process in order to help reach a broadly accepted result in the presidential election. In that capacity, the United Nations has been closely supervising an unprecedented

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full audit of every run-off ballot. Agreement on that and the political framework for creating a government of national unity emerged in an agreement between the two candidates that was facilitated by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, John Kerry, on 12 July and 8 August.

A. Political developments

4. Following the presidential election on 5 April, in which no candidate won more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second-round run-off was held on 14 June between the two leading candidates, Mr. Abdullah (45 per cent of the vote in the first round) and Mr. Ghani (31.6 per cent). In the lead-up to the run-off ballot, both candidates campaigned across the country to mobilize their respective constituencies and reach out to communities that had not participated or supported them in the first round. In parallel, the candidates sought the endorsement of influential political stakeholders, including the six unsuccessful first-round presidential candidates. While the candidates themselves conducted a respectful campaign in the interests of national unity, there was noticeably less restraint from elements within the candidates' supporters, especially across social media channels.

5. Prior to the ballot, the Independent Election Commission accredited 110,784 observers, including 70,041 candidate agents, in order to promote the transparency of the run-off election. On the basis of lessons learned from the first round and recommendations from the candidates, electoral observers and the international community, the Commission also made a number of amendments to the process, including improved pre-positioning of contingency materials to better respond to ballot shortages. About 2,000 additional polling stations were established within existing polling centres to improve voter accessibility. Despite statements issued by the Taliban, in which it denounced the election and urged a boycott of the process, opposition by the Taliban appeared uneven and gave way to more flexible local interpretations on polling day, which reportedly allowed the population to vote in a number of districts in the south-east of the country. The Commission reported that of the 6,365 polling centres that had been planned to operate on election day, 140 had been closed for security reasons.

6. At the close of polling on 14 June, the Commission reported that over 7 million ballots had been cast (62 per cent in men's polling stations and 38 per cent in women's polling stations). The turnout figures were immediately questioned by Mr. Abdullah, whose campaign team estimated a much lower turnout. On 18 June, Mr. Abdullah announced his disengagement from the electoral process, alleging institutional bias and claiming that the reported high turnout was based on massive fraud. He then demanded a halt to the tallying process and the resignation of the Commission's chief electoral officer, Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhel, who he alleged was complicit in electoral fraud. In response, Mr. Ghani stated that the large increase in turnout in a number of provinces was because of the effective efforts of his team to mobilize voters. On 23 June, the chief electoral officer resigned, emphasizing that he was doing so in the national interest and denying the allegations against him. On 25 June, Mr. Abdullah proposed six criteria aimed at addressing his concerns about fraud and including proposed procedures to further audit the vote, as preconditions for his re-engagement with the electoral process. On 28 June, the Commission rejected the preconditions. On 27 June, in Kabul, Mr. Abdullah had joined a demonstration by about 15,000 of his supporters calling for allegations of fraud to

be addressed. Similar but smaller demonstrations by his supporters took place in the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamyan.

7. In an effort to address fraud concerns and diffuse growing political tensions, the Commission began an audit of about 2,000 polling stations on 1 July, focused on stations where 599 or more votes had been cast (600 ballots were provided per station). The audit was rejected by Mr. Abdullah as insufficient to address his allegations of wide-scale fraud and he demanded an expansion of the audit. Beginning 4 July, representatives for both candidates engaged in bilateral discussions in an attempt to agree on a framework for a more expansive and robust audit. In doing so, they sought the good offices and technical advice of the United Nations. Efforts were also carried out under the general umbrella of a broader political dialogue between the two candidates, which was facilitated by vice presidents Mohammad Younous Qanooni and Mohammad Karim Khalili, at the request of President Karzai. Despite agreement by each side on a number of key issues, and the good offices of my Special Representative for Afghanistan, overall agreement on a new audit plan did not materialize.

8. In such a tense environment and with talks between the candidates' teams ongoing, preliminary run-off results were released by the Commission on 7 July, against the advice of the United Nations. The preliminary results indicated a reversal of the position of the candidates from the first round, with Mr. Ghani receiving 56.4 per cent and Mr. Abdullah 43.6 per cent of the 7,947,527 valid votes. Amid calls for the unilateral establishment of a parallel government, Mr. Abdullah publicly addressed his supporters and called upon them to remain patient for a few more days. Mr. Ghani, while accepting the preliminary results, also publicly urged his supporters to show patience and await the final results. He also welcomed possible additional audits and talks to safeguard political stability. In order to help bridge the serious divisions between the two campaign teams over the credibility of the preliminary results, on 9 and 10 July the United Nations presented a robust audit plan that would cover approximately 8,050 polling stations, but agreement could not be reached with Mr. Abdullah.

9. In response to the political impasse, Secretary of State Kerry arrived in Kabul on 11 July and commenced an intensive period of shuttle diplomacy. On 12 July, in a joint press conference hosted by the United Nations, Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani confirmed their agreement on the technical and political frameworks developed in consultation with Secretary Kerry. The key technical elements of the agreement were based upon proposals developed by the United Nations, and included a full audit of all 22,828 ballot boxes used in the run-off. It was agreed that the full audit would be carried out by the Commission at its headquarters in Kabul under extensive national and international observation and supervision, and with the full participation of, and oversight by, representatives of both candidates' teams. In accordance with the agreement and in consultation with the two candidates, the United Nations was requested to provide proposals on the conduct of the audit.

10. Both candidates agreed to participate in, and accede to the outcome of, the audit. They also agreed that the next president would form a "government of national unity", including the establishment of the position of government chief executive officer. There was further commitment to convene a loya jirga (grand council) within two years to discuss the amendment of the Constitution to establish

the position of executive prime minister, and broad agreements on parity in appointments and fundamental reforms to the electoral system within one year.

11. In order to maintain the political momentum created by the agreement, on 17 July the Commission began the physical audit of ballot boxes according to the checklist contained in the 12 July agreement. However, the two campaign teams and the Commission agreed that, while the physical audit of ballots should commence, the review of the audit findings and decisions to validate or invalidate votes would be put on hold until updated regulations on recount and invalidation criteria were agreed. In parallel, on 18 July, airlift operations were launched by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the United Nations to assist in the transport of ballot boxes used in the run-off to Kabul from the country's other 33 provinces. The movement of ballot boxes was accompanied on each occasion by Commission officials and candidate agents, and was completed without incident on 5 August.

12. On 24 July, after 10 days of consultations with the two campaign teams and the Commission, the United Nations presented to the Commission a proposed set of recount and invalidation criteria, which were formally adopted on 30 July after further consultations with the campaign teams. Reassurance was provided that as new information was uncovered by the audit, the United Nations would consider whether the relevant procedures required refining.

13. Progress on the audit during July was slow, marked by candidate teams sporadically suspending their participation. Following the Eid al-Fitr break, and with the regulatory framework completed and discussions with candidates reaffirming commitment to complete the process in a timely fashion, the audit proceeded more smoothly. On 16 August, the Commission commenced the special scrutiny of nominated ballot boxes as part of the proposals to improve the progress of the audit process. It was agreed that each candidate could request special scrutiny of up to 3,000 ballot boxes, in order to increase confidence through heightened attention to the ballot boxes over which they had greatest concerns. All ballot boxes requiring special scrutiny underwent a full audit and were automatically recounted.

14. The improved functioning of the audit was facilitated by a global effort to mobilize several hundred electoral observers from the European Union Election Assessment Team, the Asian Network for Free Elections, the United States-based non-governmental organizations National Democratic Institute and Democracy International, and several Afghan domestic observer organizations, such as the Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Youth National and Social Organization. Furthermore, 17 international diplomatic missions in Kabul volunteered diplomatic staff to support the audit as observers. In addition to 48 resident United Nations electoral experts and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) staff, my electoral adviser, a United Nations senior international elections expert and the senior global electoral adviser of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, more than 123 electoral experts from across the United Nations were rapidly deployed from United Nations offices and missions around the world to assist in the supervision of the audit process and to provide advice on international best practices.

15. On 7 August, Secretary of State Kerry returned to Kabul to support the two candidates in refining and reaffirming the political commitments they had made on 12 July. On 8 August, Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani agreed to a joint communiqué

and, at the subsequent press conference hosted by my Special Representative, stressed the need to move beyond the campaign period and to concentrate on forming a government of national unity. In the communiqué, the candidates underscored the primacy of the Constitution and reaffirmed the 12 July commitments to the political and technical tracks. They reconfirmed that the next president would form a government of national unity based on the previously agreed principles of merit and parity with the opposition, and announced that they would establish a joint commission to negotiate the details of the new government structure. The two candidates also agreed to move the audit process forward based on United Nations criteria for audit, recount and invalidations, with the goal of holding the presidential inauguration by the end of August. Both candidates and President Karzai publicly reiterated a desire to see the audit completed and a new president announced within that time frame.

16. On 17 August, in reaction to the agreement for a government of national unity, protests took place in Kandahar City with some protesters threatening to support the Taliban movement if a coalition government were "imposed" on Afghanistan and demanding that if there were to be a government of national unity, it should include the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami. On 19 August, clashes between campaign agents and temporary election workers took place at the Kabul audit site, which resulted in several injuries.

17. On 25 August, the first set of ballot adjudication decisions was released by the Independent Election Commission. This first set included 3,545 boxes; of those, the results from 72 were judged invalid and a further 697 were subject to a recount. Following the release, Mr. Abdullah's campaign team announced its intention to withdraw from the audit process, and subsequently did so on 27 August. In the light of the withdrawal, and in order to maintain the integrity and fairness of the process, the United Nations requested Mr. Ghani's team to withdraw its agents from the audit, thereby allowing the audit to be finalized in the presence of electoral officials, United Nations advisers and independent observers. On 5 September, the Commission announced that it had completed the physical audit of all 22,828 ballot boxes.

18. The final results of the provincial council elections held on 5 April were originally due to be released on 7 June, but the consideration by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission of complaints related to those elections was put on hold amid work to conclude the presidential elections. On 16 August the Complaints Commission resumed the adjudication of 2,918 complaints related to the provincial council polls, requesting the Independent Election Commission to conduct a recount of ballot boxes from Kabul, Nangarhar, Parwan and Baghlan provinces.

19. During the reporting period, the National Assembly approved a number of laws, including on the combating the financing of terror and on combating money laundering, which were enacted by the President on 26 June. The laws on social welfare, on mining and on access to information were also approved by both houses.

20. As a result of the political focus on the presidential election run-off, there was limited progress on the peace process during the reporting period. On 21 June, a suicide attack in Kabul targeted the motorcade of the head of the High Peace Council secretariat, Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai. One civilian was killed and several others injured, including Mr. Stanekzai. The joint secretariat of the Afghan

Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that, as at 15 August, a total of 8,880 individuals, including 803 commanders, had joined the programme, and 6,794 weapons had been collected. A total of 164 small grants projects had been approved in 25 provinces, providing short-term employment opportunities for community members and for individuals being reintegrated.

21. On 1 July, President Karzai again called on the Taliban to renounce violence and avoid acting as an instrument for outsiders seeking to weaken Afghanistan, highlighting clashes in Hilmand Province. On 25 July, a statement attributed to Mullah Mohammad Omar, released to mark Eid al-Fitr, emphasized that the movement had no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and directed Taliban fighters to avoid civilian casualties. On 4 August, officials of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's armed faction of Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin stated that a delegation had travelled to Kabul to mediate between the two presidential candidates and to discuss the possibility of the faction joining the new government. Representatives of both candidates later denied that such discussions had taken place.

B. Security

22. Insurgent groups, international terrorists and associated networks took advantage of the protracted political and electoral crisis and uncertainty to mount major assaults around the country, notably in Hilmand Province in the south, Faryab and Ghor provinces in the west, Logar Province in the centre, Nangarhar and Nuristan provinces in the east and Kunduz Province in the north-east. There were attempts not only to capture but also to hold territory, with the use of forces several hundred strong in "swarm attacks" to overwhelm district administrative centres and security checkpoints, which resulted in considerable casualties among civilians, security personnel and insurgents. The objective appears to be an attempt to project insurgent influence greater than is actually the case. The Afghan security forces continue to demonstrate their effectiveness in countering the majority of insurgent offensives and recovering control of district centres and security installations, even if they lack the resources to curtail insurgent presence and freedom of movement, particularly in remote rural districts. The developments have taken place against considerable public and media attention with regard to the negative impact of the electoral impasse on Afghan security, the impending end of the ISAF mission and the military operation of Pakistan in North Waziristan Agency.

23. The United Nations continued to monitor security-related events relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilians across the country and having an impact on the delivery of United Nations-mandated activities and programmes. Between 1 June and 15 August, the United Nations recorded 5,456 security-related incidents across the country, which represents an increase of 10.7 per cent over the same period in 2013 and an increase of 18.7 per cent over the same period in 2012. However, when compared with 2011 figures, it reflected a decrease of 12.6 per cent. A total of 13 incidents affected United Nations personnel, including the arrest of a national staff member, four incidents of intimidation, one remote-controlled improvised explosive device detonation against a United Nations convoy, one small-arms-fire/stoning incident against a United Nations convoy transporting food and the theft of food in a separate incident. The increased number of incidents was related to operations led by Afghan security forces centred on the second round of

the presidential elections, the Taliban's ongoing "Khaibar" offensive and insurgent efforts to disrupt the electoral process. On 14 June, as Afghans went to the polls for the presidential run-off, the United Nations recorded 530 security incidents nationwide, representing an increase of 11.3 per cent over the first round of the elections on 5 April; at least 237 incidents were directly related to the election process.

24. During the reporting period, armed clashes accounted for 47.3 per cent of security incidents, followed by improvised explosive devices (29.1 per cent). In seeking to exert influence through fear and intimidation, targeted killings continued at a high level. In total, between 1 June and 15 August, 211 assassinations and 30 failed assassination attempts were recorded, which represents an increase of 7.1 per cent over the same period in 2013. During the same period, 36 suicide attacks were recorded, which signifies a marginal increase when compared with the previous reporting period (32 suicide attacks) and the same period in 2013 (33 suicide attacks). Significant incidents during the reported period included a suicide attack on 15 July in a busy market area in Urgun district, Paktika Province, in the south-eastern part of the country, that killed 43 civilians and wounded 95 others. In Ghor Province, in the west, people were executed on 24 July 15 after the buses they were travelling on were stopped by unknown gunmen. On 5 August, an insider attack at the Afghan National Defence University killed a senior international military officer and four Afghan personnel, wounding a further 14 international and six Afghan military personnel.

25. Overall, security incidents in the southern, south-eastern and eastern parts of the country accounted for 65.3 per cent of total incidents. In those areas anti-Government elements were able to maintain a strong presence and high activity levels, aided by access to supply routes and support from segments of the population, including through intimidation.

26. As at 20 July 2014, the Afghan National Army numbered 183,343 personnel, of which 6,929 were members of the Afghan air force, against an overall force structure ceiling of 187,000. Overall attrition rates remain consistent with the previous period, and re-enlistment rates remain low, including for experienced soldiers and junior officers. At the time of reporting, the United Nations-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan supported 147,077 police personnel and 5,640 Central Prison Department guards, against a target of 157,000. To enhance the level of accountability and transparency, a sustained effort to increase the payment of salaries to the bank accounts of personnel covered by the Fund has resulted in the direct deposit of monthly disbursements for 82 per cent of police personnel and 98 per cent of prison guards. The Ministry of the Interior has also received support from UNAMA to incorporate community policing practices and formalize the establishment of women police councils at the provincial level, in the form of assistance with the development of policy frameworks and operational guidelines in both areas.

27. The security initiative of the Afghan Local Police overseen by the Ministry of the Interior continued to expand. As at 15 August, 28,780 personnel were present in 150 districts in 29 provinces; the remaining balance of the 30,000 authorized personnel were reportedly either under recruitment or in training. A majority of communities reported improved security following Afghan Local Police deployment.

C. Regional cooperation

28. Afghanistan continued to engage its neighbours in the promotion of regional cooperation, with particular focus on engagement with Pakistan on security issues. On 25 June, the adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on national security and foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, addressed the Foreign Relations Committee of the Pakistan Senate and pledged to develop a joint strategy with the new Government of Afghanistan to fight extremism and terrorism, to ensure that the respective territories were not used for attacks or subversion against each other, and to expand cooperation in other matters. On 26 June, the National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, led a delegation of senior officials to Islamabad for talks with Pakistani counterparts on anti-terror cooperation and the role of Pakistan in Afghan peace efforts. Both sides agreed to establish a high-level joint working group on security.

29. Tensions continued along the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with reciprocal allegations of support and sanctuary for insurgent groups linked to attacks on each other's territory. On 4 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan claimed there was evidence of Pakistan's continuing support for terrorism in Afghanistan, and lodged a protest against incursions from Pakistan and cross-border rocket attacks in Kunar Province in the eastern part of the country. Pakistani authorities denied being involved in such acts. The same day, Pakistani authorities reissued a call for Afghanistan to hand over the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Mullah Fazlullah, alleging that he was hiding in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

30. On 2 July, in Kabul, President Karzai met with the Islamic Republic of Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Pacific Affairs, Ebrahim Rahimpour, to discuss how to develop bilateral relationships in all fields. On 8 July, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Turkmenistan signed the operational plan for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline.

31. On 10 July, the latest Senior Officials Meeting of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan was held in Beijing co-chaired by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Ershad Ahmadi, and the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Liu Zhenmin. There was broad participation, including representatives of 12 Governments. The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to make additional comments on the draft declaration for the fourth Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process, and presentations were made on the progress achieved in the six confidence-building measures.

32. On 24 July, the new special envoy of China for Afghanistan visited Kabul for talks on his country's increased economic engagement and potential role in the peace process. On 27 July it was announced that the fourth Ministerial Conference, owing to have been held in Tianjin on 29 August, had been postponed due to the prolonged electoral process in Afghanistan. A new date has yet to be determined.

33. My Special Representative visited Tehran on 16 and 17 August and Islamabad on 27 August, meeting with senior government officials. There was consensus in both capitals that the stability of Afghanistan was in the shared interest of the region, and expressions of support for a government of national unity based on

partnership were made. A broadly accepted electoral outcome was seen as a priority, with support for measures to enhance the credibility of the process.

III. Human rights

34. On 9 July UNAMA released its mid-year report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2014. In the report, UNAMA documented 1,564 civilian deaths and 3,289 civilian injuries (4,853 civilian casualties), an increase of 24 per cent over the same period in 2013. It attributed 74 per cent of the casualties to anti-Government elements and 9 per cent to pro-Government forces, with 12 per cent occurring during ground engagements between both parties where the perpetrator could not be determined. UNAMA also noted that ground engagements, including small arms, rockets and mortar fire, had become the leading cause of civilian casualties, particularly for women and children, reflecting an increase of 89 per cent in casualties documented from ground engagements and accounting for 39 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first six months of 2014. The use of improvised explosive devices had also increased by 7 per cent, causing 463 civilian deaths and 1,000 injuries (1,463 civilian casualties), the highest figure for the tactic since 2009. UNAMA also noted the resurgence of the use of indiscriminate pressure-plate improvised explosive devices, which had killed 161 civilians and injured another 147 (308 civilian casualties), an increase of 33 per cent over the same period in 2013. It observed that the Taliban had directly claimed responsibility for 147 attacks, which had resulted in 234 civilian deaths and 319 civilian injuries (553 civilian casualties). Taliban fighters appeared to direct 75 of such attacks at military targets, indiscriminately harming civilians, while 69 attacks deliberately targeted civilian objectives. UNAMA also documented 22 civilian deaths and 29 civilian injuries (51 civilian casualties) attributed to Afghan local police ground engagements and human rights violations, on a par with the same period in 2013. Although some instances of arrests and convictions regarding such violations were recorded, impunity remained the norm.

35. Between 1 June and 15 August, UNAMA documented 2,891 civilian casualties (956 killed, 1,935 injured), caused mainly by ground engagements (282 killed, 898 injured), improvised explosive devices (265 killed, 617 injured) and suicide and complex attacks (95 killed, 249 injured). Women and children constituted 28 per cent of casualties. Anti-Government elements were deemed to cause 75 per cent of all civilian casualties during this period, while pro-Government forces were responsible for 8 per cent; 15 per cent were attributed to ground engagements between both parties, with the remaining casualties unattributed or caused by cross-border shelling. Violence related to the presidential election run-off also affected the protection of civilians. On 14 June, during the run-off, UNAMA documented 217 civilian casualties (54 deaths, 163 injured), including men and women exercising their right to vote, Commission staff, children and other civilians, resulting from attacks that deliberately targeted the electoral process. In addition to the civilian casualties, UNAMA received reports of 87 police casualties: 21 police were killed and 66 injured, targeted while protecting polling centres or escorting Commission convoys of electoral materials. On 27 July, the secretariat of the Council of Ministers issued a statement reiterating the importance of protecting the civilian population during security operations and banning the use of heavy weapons in residential and populated areas. The Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the

Interior and the National Directorate of Security were further reminded of the presidential decree issued in February 2013 banning aerial attacks on residential areas to prevent civilian casualties.

36. Between 1 June and 15 August the United Nations-led country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented 215 incidents that had resulted in the deaths of 158 children and injury to a further 322 children. Most of the child casualties were reported from the eastern region, where 113 children had been killed and injured. Ground engagements were the leading cause of child deaths and injuries, killing 54 children and injuring 180. On the day of the presidential election run-off, 19 children were killed and 57 injured, marking the highest number of child casualties in any one day since the task force had begun documenting child casualties in 2009. It also documented three incidents of underage recruitment and five incidents of child abduction.

37. On 14 July, the United Nations welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the 2011 action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment, including improved age verification and screening of new recruits, and training for the Afghan security forces in respect of children in armed conflict. On 23 July, following a series of meetings with the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice, the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee on Children and Armed Conflict agreed on a "road map towards compliance". The United Nations coordinated the provision of technical support to the Government in the implementation of the road map. The Mission also undertook a series of advocacy initiatives with governmental and non-governmental interlocutors across the country to support the launch of its booklet on protecting Afghanistan's children in armed conflict.

38. The Mission continued to provide the Government of Afghanistan with technical support and advice on the elimination of violence against women. In relation to the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework process, UNAMA provided technical support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs for the development of an action plan based on the recommendations of the first government report on implementation of the law on elimination of violence against women. In particular, proposals for a conference on the development of guidelines on mediation in cases of violence against women were incorporated into the plan. The Mission also provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with support to strengthen the 2015-2018 national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In addition, as part of the ongoing process of strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of the Interior for the integration of female police officers and their protection from sexual abuse, UNAMA advocated for the creation of an independent complaints mechanism, which has been accepted in principle by the Ministry.

39. On 13 July, a presidential decree was issued confirming the accession by Afghanistan to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. At the same time, Afghanistan's High Commission for Combating Human Trafficking established commissions on trafficking at the provincial level, headed by the provincial governor and comprising representatives from relevant ministries. With respect to the decision in December 2013 by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights

Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to defer its decision on the accreditation of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Commission, on 30 June, provided the Committee with information on how it had been actively addressing the Committee's concerns about the selection and appointment process for commissioners. Civil society also provided its own submission in support of the Commission.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul Process and coordination of development assistance

40. Preparations for the ministerial development conference on Afghanistan to be held in London on 25 November provided the focus for substantive dialogue between the Government and the international community during the reporting period. On 23 June, the Ministry of Finance and the international community agreed at a meeting that the goal of the conference would be a renewal of existing Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework commitments. The Ministry and the representatives of the international community underscored the importance of the conference and emphasized private sector-led growth to foster economic development and international investment to help reduce the aid dependency of Afghanistan. The conference will also highlight the role of an empowered civil society and private sector as well as regional government engagement to achieve the Framework goals. Donors have started consultation and consensus-building among international community stakeholders on a "refreshed" Framework through several area-specific working groups. Those inputs will guide their engagement with the next administration in preparation for the London Conference on Afghanistan. The Civil Society Joint Working Group, a network of nearly 1,000 civil society organizations, started preparations for both the main conference and the planned civil society side event.

41. The economic situation remains challenging. On 22 July, the Ministry of Finance reported that for the period from 1 January to 30 June non-customs revenue collection stood at 20 per cent below target and 2 per cent below the revenue collected for the corresponding period in 2013. The Government attributed the poor revenue performance to the holding back of tax by business establishments, including some large international companies, and the continued decline in investments. In addition, the collection of customs dues fell below target by 23 per cent, and 8 per cent below tax collected for the corresponding period in 2013. Tax revenue collection was affected largely by a reduction of 22 per cent in imports of high-value items. The Minister of Finance, Omar Zakhilwal, estimated a financing gap of $537 million as a result of the political uncertainty and a slower growth rate than anticipated. The Ministry of Finance indicated that the situation was unlikely to improve before the new Government came into office. Control measures already taken included lowering discretionary development spending, reducing operations and maintenance expenses and further improving revenue collection (including customs). Some improvement in revenue collection was recorded in July, in contrast with performance over the first six months of 2014. Donors continue to engage with the Ministry of Finance on the extent and causes of the funding gap and among themselves on possible responses.

42. Government efforts to promote licit economic growth and anti-corruption measures progressed during the reporting period. Following President Karzai's enactment on 26 June of the laws on combating the financing of terrorism and on combating money laundering, the Financial Action Task Force, the intergovernmental body that sets guidelines for the prevention of international money-laundering and terrorist financing, announced on 27 June the suspension of its decision to downgrade the country's anti-corruption status. However, the Task Force indicated that if the law was not implemented by October 2014, it would again consider a downgrading. Such a decision would restrict the engagement of financial institutions in Afghanistan with international correspondent banks, limit financial flows in and out of the country and make financing international trade difficult.

V. Humanitarian assistance

43. On 15 July, the Ministry of Public Health released the findings of the 2013 national nutrition survey, which had been conducted with technical support from the United Nations. While progress and improvements have been recorded since the previous survey, the findings in respect of stunting (40.9 per cent) and severe wasting (4 per cent) in children under 5 years of age exceed key United Nations emergency thresholds. The findings indicated that low coverage of key nutrition interventions and poor awareness about infant and young child feeding practices were contributing to the dual problems of acute and chronic undernutrition. In Afghanistan, 12.6 per cent of all annual child deaths, which total 189,000, are associated with acute malnutrition. The common humanitarian fund has prioritized allocation for addressing severe acute malnutrition to support the response by the United Nations and non-governmental organization partners in eight provinces where severe acute malnutrition emergency thresholds have been breached.

44. Between 31 May and 15 August, Afghanistan recorded two polio cases, for a total of eight since 1 January, with six cases reported from the east of the country and with one case each from the south and west. During the period of April to July, national immunization campaigns were conducted, targeting 8.9 million children under 5 years of age, as were subnational immunization campaigns targeting 3.5 million of those children in high-risk areas. On 10 July, a cross-border coordination meeting was held between technical experts from Kandahar Province in the south and neighbouring Balochistan Province in Pakistan to synchronize the vaccination activities.

45. Following the commencement of the military operation of Pakistan in North Waziristan Agency on 15 June, as at 15 August an estimated 13,000 families had crossed into Khost and Paktika provinces in eastern Afghanistan. An estimated 80 per cent of that population has taken refuge with host communities across 14 districts along the border. A response plan is being implemented by local authorities with the support of international partners in both Khost and Paktika for a period of up to six months to support priority ongoing interventions to meet the most urgent and acute humanitarian needs.

46. As at 31 July, the internally displaced persons task force, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the United Nations, recorded 60,307 persons displaced in Afghanistan owing to conflict in 2014, bringing the cumulative

total of the internally displaced to 701,909 persons. Ongoing military clashes in several northern Hilmand districts from 20 June resulted in significant civilian casualties and internal displacement. Owing to the high levels of insecurity, the ability of humanitarian actors to directly access the displaced populations of concern in those districts has been highly restricted, with road movements strictly curtailed. Ongoing hostilities in the Qaysar district of Faryab Province in the north of the country have also resulted in the reported displacement of up to 674 families.

47. During the first seven months of 2014, a total of 10,055 Afghan refugees (averaging 47 individuals per day) voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan: 7,168 individuals returned from Pakistan, 2,741 from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 146 from other countries. Since January and until the time of reporting, the rate of return showed a sharp decrease of 65 per cent compared with the same period in 2013. The decrease in the return figure so far in 2014 is partly attributable to uncertainty regarding the Afghan elections and concerns about security during the transitional period.

48. Following the initial identification in the shelter recovery plan of 8,164 shelters that had been destroyed by flooding in April and May across northern Afghanistan, funding allocations, including from the emergency response fund, for up to 941 shelters have been confirmed to date.

49. In the mine action sector, during the reporting period four battlefields and 72 minefields were cleared in 32 communities, with an additional five districts declared mine-free. The United Nations continued to work with ISAF to help ensure that the bases and firing ranges being closed or transferred were cleared of unexploded ordnance; 95.4 km^2 have been cleared and more than 34,000 explosive items and almost 12,900 items of small arms ammunition have been removed or destroyed.

50. Humanitarian access constraints continued to be recorded under the United Nations global monitoring framework. Attacks against personnel, assets and facilities and the violation of health facilities remain key areas of concern. As at 15 August, 117 incidents of violence against personnel, assets and facilities were recorded in 2014, resulting in 37 deaths and 35 injuries among aid workers, with 114 abductions and attempted abductions and the arrest and detention of five personnel. Between 1 January and 15 August, 41 incidents affected non-governmental and Government-managed health facilities and assets, the majority in the eastern and central provinces.

51. Overall humanitarian funding for Afghanistan, as at 15 August, reached $345 million, of which $206 million is aligned with the United Nations strategic response plan for Afghanistan (51 per cent funded). Of the remaining balance, $56 million has been reported for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, almost $30 million has been committed for humanitarian action but not allocated, and the remainder is reported as not aligned. Of the funds aligned with the plan, two thirds have been allocated to United Nations agencies and one third to non-governmental organizations. The top humanitarian donors to Afghanistan to date are the United States, Japan, Canada, the Republic of Korea, Denmark and Sweden. A mid-year review of the $406 million plan by the humanitarian country team in July reprioritized the proposed allocations, given the additional needs arising from the national nutrition survey, the influx of refugees coming from Pakistan and the post-flood shelter response.

VI. Counter-narcotics

52. Initial assessments show that 2,692 ha of poppy fields were eradicated in 2014, which would represent a decrease of 63 per cent compared with 2013. The drop can in part be attributed to the focus of security forces on protecting the electoral process. Between 1 June and 16 August, the counter-narcotics police of Afghanistan conducted 597 operations, resulting in the arrest of 529 suspects, the dismantling of 16 illicit heroin laboratories and the seizure of 4,460 kg of precursor chemicals, 13,295 kg of opium, 105 kg of poppy seeds, 654 kg of heroin, 2,642 kg of hashish, 2,165 kg of amphetamines, 2 kg of morphine, 81 vehicles and 66 weapons of different types. During these operations, nine police officers were wounded in the line of duty.

53. A regional conference was held on 26 and 27 June in Kazakhstan, with a focus on addressing drugs and HIV. From 2 to 4 July, a regional workshop was held in Kyrgyzstan, entitled "Illicit use of money and value transfer services: enhancing inter-agency working and financial intelligence". The workshop facilitated the second meeting of the regional anti-money laundering group of experts in West and Central Asia.

VII. Mission support

54. UNAMA continued to align resources to best meet its mandate in the current uncertain political, security and financial environment. During the reporting period, assessments of the potential impact on the United Nations of the drawdown of international military forces continued to be conducted, particularly in regard to the security of airports and medical support.

55. In order to support the United Nations efforts in assisting the audit process of the presidential elections, UNAMA coordinated the provision of secure accommodation for more than 100 European Union observers at the United Nations Office complex in Afghanistan. In addition, UNAMA worked in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme to provide additional air assets to support the retrieval of ballots from Commission facilities across the country to its headquarters in Kabul as part of the audit process.

56. The Mission submitted an interim budget for the first six months of 2015 on the basis of a technical rollover of current staffing and other resources. A technical assessment is planned for the fourth quarter of 2014, following the awaited political transition and in view of the ongoing security transition; the outcome of the assessment will be reflected in the full budget submission for 2015 to be submitted in 2015.

VIII. Observations

57. The reporting period has been an extremely trying one for Afghanistan, with the prolonged and contested electoral process exacerbating economic uncertainty, emboldening spoilers and increasing popular disenchantment. With the impact felt in every sphere of life, there is palpable anxiety among a people who remember all too well that when governance arrangements failed previously there was descent

into civil war. I salute the courage and determination of the millions of Afghan women and men who participated in the two rounds of polling as voters, candidates, campaign and electoral workers, and observers. Their wish to achieve a peaceful, democratic leadership transition must be respected.

58. It was in the face of the stalemate following the second round of voting, and at the request of the two candidates and the President, that the United Nations assumed a supervisory role in the audit process, which remains under the full authority and responsibility of the Afghan electoral bodies. Despite the unprecedented scale and complexity of that ambitious exercise, the audit was initiated within days and has continued steadily, if at an uneven pace, with the intention to weed out fraudulent votes from valid votes cast on 14 June. With the support of Secretary of State Kerry, the two candidates committed on 12 July to abiding by the outcome of the audit in deciding the country's next leader, and reiterated that commitment on 8 August. In conjunction with those efforts, an intra-Afghan dialogue has been conducted to elaborate the form and functions of the agreed government of national unity. The many economic and security challenges that Afghanistan faces require strong leadership and unity of purpose: commitment to genuine partnership is thus vital.

59. Amid the prolonged political uncertainty and the continuing international military drawdown during the reporting period, spoilers — the Taliban, associated insurgent groups, domestic and international terrorist networks, criminal groups and local powerbrokers — have reasserted themselves. Civilians are increasingly caught in the crossfire, with alarming increases in the number of deaths and injuries among women and children. The changing nature of the conflict has resulted in ground engagements becoming the leading cause of civilian casualties. Challenges to humanitarian access are also increasing, and I welcome the progress being made in ensuring immunization campaigns in conflict-afflicted areas. The United Nations continues to seek engagement with all parties, including with respect to ensuring that humanitarian and human rights obligations are understood and met, to help alleviate the impact of the armed conflict on civilians.

60. Larger-scale engagements by anti-Government forces throughout the 2014 fighting season have tested Afghan security forces. While military and police personnel are responding bravely to the massive challenge, continuous and substantial international assistance will be required for several years to support Afghan institutions in ensuring the capacity and capability to decisively counter ongoing threats. I commend the sustained commitment of so many countries to ISAF, while acknowledging that their commitment has been at the cost of many lives. With Afghans now fully responsible for the security of their country, and as ISAF nears the end of its mandate, I urge that international commitments to the sustainment of Afghan forces made at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summits in Lisbon and Chicago, United States, be met. Agreed legal frameworks and planning parameters are necessary to prepare and implement future security assistance. It is disappointing that the continuing delay in the electoral outcome precluded Afghanistan from being represented by a new leadership at the NATO summit held in Newport, Wales, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on 4 and 5 September, where the international partners of Afghanistan once again reiterated their principled commitment to continued support after 2014. The new administration will need to move rapidly in taking decisions on approaches to security. I welcome the joint statement of the two candidates addressed to the NATO summit, in which they committed to an "inclusive political

vision" and a government of national unity, as well as to concluding the bilateral security agreement with the United States and a status of forces agreement with NATO.

61. Tackling the growing funding gap of Afghanistan and ensuring that recurrent budgetary costs can be met will also be an immediate challenge for the new administration. The prolonged electoral period, which saw senior government positions vacated, months of campaigning and the severe uncertainty of the post-election impasse, contributed to a precipitous drop in growth, a decline in investor confidence and poor revenue performance. The economic situation of Afghanistan today is of grave concern. The ministerial development conference, to be held in London in November, will provide a vital opportunity to reaffirm partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and donors around the central architecture of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and in line with the priorities and programmes of the new administration. The booming illicit economy of Afghanistan is both a symptom and source of uncertainty and shows no sign of abating. I urge the exercise of serious political will by the new administration and the international community to ensure effective, long-term counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan based on development priorities that strengthen the licit economy and undercut the illicit economy.

62. The impact of the uncertainty has also been felt beyond the borders of Afghanistan, with its neighbours underscoring the need for a stable government and effective governance. The importance attached to the relationship of Afghanistan with its regional partners can be seen in plans for the fourth Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process, to be held in Tianjin, China, to move regional cooperation to a higher level, and in the gathering's postponement to await the new administration. I encourage all participants and supporters to increase active and constructive engagement in moving forward with that important initiative and its related confidence-building measures. Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been challenging during the reporting period. I call upon the two neighbours to use the opportunity of a new administration in Kabul to reset the relationship and increase the space for effective cooperation in areas of shared interest, including security, counter-terrorism, Afghan-led reconciliation efforts and economic development.

63. A transfer of power through the electoral process, and the candidates' acceptance of the results, is the only means to provide a new leader and government with the mandate required to tackle the many challenges. A legitimate transfer of power is also the best way to protect the institutional and legal frameworks of Afghanistan and public confidence in them. With events still in the balance, I encourage the country's leaders to put the wishes of the people and national unity to the fore in guarding against miscalculation or misadventure and to help restore their trust in the democratic process. I am proud of the extraordinary response of the United Nations to its agreed role in the audit process, and its support for political agreements, as a concrete demonstration of the Organization's commitment to its conflict prevention mandate and the success of Afghanistan's transition. The rapid, system-wide mobilization of resources, personnel and technical expertise showcases the "One United Nations" initiative at its finest. Efforts have been further enhanced by the UNAMA network of 13 field offices. I also acknowledge the Member States and regional organizations that rapidly deployed international observers, as well as transport and security support, through ISAF.

64. I would like to express my gratitude to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, for his outstanding service to Afghanistan and its people. Mr. Kubiš' leadership of the United Nations in Afghanistan has come at a critical moment of transition for the country, and he has provided a clear sense of purpose and calm professionalism in fulfilling the mandate of the Organization. In so doing, he has worked impartially with all Afghan, regional and international partners, exemplifying the values and principles of the United Nations. I would also like to express my gratitude to all national and international staff members of the United Nations in Afghanistan for their continued dedication, often under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.